Manuscript: Woman and the League of Nations

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Woman and the League of Nations

The League of Nations is the first great governmental undertaking in human history to start wide open to women. It accepts them as a matter of course, and it is left to them, as it is to men, to find their way to any one of the multitude of posts which the Covenant creates. There is nothing to prevent a woman's sitting in the Council or the Assembly if her country wants her there. If her country should take the stand that it does not want a woman as its representative in the Council or the Assembly of the League that would be a matter for her to settle, not with the League but at home. It would be a domestic affair, to be settled by domestic methods.

When it comes to positions over which the League does have control, as are all of those in the great permanent Secretariat and in the various Commissions, these words are set down in the Covenant:

"All posts under or in connection with the League, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women."

It is a question if women have quite realized what opportunities this opens to them, particularly to those of special training. The work under the Secretariat will require not only the best trained but breadth of view and depth of culture, if this body is to be kept from sinking into something that compares to the ordinary government department or bureau.
In the great Commissions which the Covenant creates, clearing houses for the industrial, economic and humanitarian interests of the earth, there will be room for the specially fitted woman, the expert of wisdom and experience. No one who followed the League's international labor conference, held in Washington last fall, could have failed to have been impressed by the number of superior women that came from the thirty or more different countries represented. These women came in various capacities; particularly impressive were the number of expert advisers in different delegations. It is true there was no woman delegate, but here again it was not the fault of the League. Any government is free to send a woman as one of its representatives to this conference. Labor is free to send a woman. The employer is free to send a woman. As in the case of women not being sent to the Council or the Assembly this is a matter to be looked after by the women at home.

More than one of the great commissions created for the noble purpose of unifying the business of the world and handling its humanitarian and social problems concerns itself directly with women's interests. A large part of the agenda of the League's first labor conference was directed to the consideration of the hours and conditions under which women in various countries may work. Not only the health and the labor conditions,
but the moral conditions of the women of the earth have come under the guardianship of the League. When the League of Nations decided to make itself responsible for the carrying out of the agreements looking to the suppression of the white slave traffic—agreements which have been for many years now written into international agreements but which it has never been possible to carry out because of the lack of a central authority or supervision—it took upon itself one of the world's miseries which has been the most terrible to women. The League agrees to supervise the white slave traffic agreements, that is, to see that they are enforced, and in this work it will unquestionably seek the cooperation of organizations of women and employ many women as agents.

This acceptance of the woman as a part of this first great attempt to bring all civilized people of the earth into a genuine cooperation was not an accident. If there had not been a persistent collective effort by women in Paris, the relation of women to the League might easily have been overlooked in the turmoil and clash which surrounded all of the work of the Peace Conference. The determination to be a part of whatever association of nations might grow out of the Conference, took form in Paris under the initiation of a group of French women, soon after the armistice was signed. It went on quietly and intelligently throughout the entire period of the Conference. All told, probably forty or fifty French women, representing a great variety of points of
view, political, social and religious, met regularly to consider what they wanted and the strategy of getting it. Under the conditions of travel and the limitations of war regulations still in force it was difficult to secure help from other nations. Now and then an English woman came over, now and then one from Belgium or Italy, and there were a few from America. This little group of women quietly worked out what they felt should be done, and then set about to get it. They made out a program. They went from President Wilson to Lloyd George, from Lloyd George to Orlando, from Orlando to Clemenceau; and following the Big Four they went to one after another of lesser leaders. Everywhere, so they told me, they met with a sympathetic reception. Everywhere they were told frankly that women must be a part of the League if it was to be a success.

That all that the group wished was not written into the League is of course true. Nobody probably has in the Covenant of the League of Nations all that he wanted, in the form that he wanted it; but the really essential thing so far as women are concerned is there—they are a part of the League of Nations. It now remains for them to play their part.

It is the greatest opportunity that has ever come to womankind, to work for peace and order. Here they can get their hands directly on the causes of disorders and injustice which are at the bottom of all wars. They can fight inside of an international machine, the avowed purpose of which is to promote
international coöperation, which is pledged not to resort to war but looks to secure justice through the exercise of intelligence and moral force. All of the principles of life which appeal most directly to serious and unselfish women are behind this League. It is upon the exercise of these principles that the League depends for its success, and nothing else. This great beneficent machinery is opened fully to them; the first time, as I have said, that any governmental undertaking has been fully opened to them. What the League of Nations is to become in the world depends in no small part upon the way women take advantage of the vast opportunity that has been put within their reach.